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New England District

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Corps of Engineers to hold public scoping meetings for EIS on proposed wind farm in Nantucket Sound

CONCORD, Mass. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will hold public scoping meetings March 6-7 as part of the process for preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed wind farm power generation field in Nantucket Sound, Mass.

Cape Wind Associates, LLC, applied to the Corps for a Section 10/404 Individual Permit for the installation and operation of 170 offshore Wind Turbine Generators in federal and state waters off the coast of Massachusetts in Horseshoe Shoals in Nantucket Sound. The Corps determined that an EIS will be required for this proposed project. A Notice of Intent to conduct the EIS and scoping meetings was published in the Federal Register Jan. 30.

Public scoping meetings are scheduled for: Wednesday, March 6 beginning at 1:30 p.m. (registration to begin at noon) in the JFK Federal Building, Conference Room C, 55 New Sudbury St., Boston, Mass.; and Thursday, March 7 starting at 6:30 p.m. (registration to begin at 5:30 p.m.) in the Mattacheese Middle School, 400 Higgins Crowell Road in West Yarmouth, Mass. Stenographers will be available at both meetings to record public comments and written statements.

The applicant proposes to generate up to 420 MW of renewable energy that will be distributed to the New England regional power grid, including Cape Cod and the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. The power will be transmitted to shore via a submarine cable system to a landfall site in Yarmouth, Mass. The proposed wind turbine array would occupy about 28 square miles in an area of Nantucket Sound known as Horseshoe Shoals between Nantucket Island and the Cape Cod mainland.

The Corps of Engineers, the lead federal agency on the federal EIS process, will work closely with Massachusetts' officials in conducting its own Environmental Impact Review (EIR) of the project, required under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act.

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The product will be a joint EIS/EIR.

The federal EIS process starts with publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register, followed by scoping meetings to solicit public input and further define issues that need to be addressed in the EIS. This leads to a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for public and agency review and comment. The process continues to the publication of a Final EIS for public review and comment. This then leads to a Record of Decision.

“The Corps will conduct an open scoping and public involvement process during the development of the EIS,” said Larry Rosenberg, the Corps’ New England District Public Affairs Officer. “Scoping is the process for determining the range of issues to be addressed and for identifying significant issues or areas that would be analyzed in depth in the EIS. Scoping meetings are open to everyone and the public is encouraged to participate and express their views and concerns. We welcome an open forum and exchange of information throughout this whole EIS process.”

The EIS is being coordinated with numerous state and federal agencies. Their input will be included in the EIS. The normal time to conduct an EIS is about 18-36 months depending on the complexity of the information that needs to be gathered.

“The decision whether to issue a permit will be based on the findings of the EIS and based on an evaluation of the probable impact of the proposed activity on the public interest,” said Christine Godfrey, the Corps’ New England District Regulatory Division chief. “That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources.

“The benefits which may reasonably accrue from the proposal must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments,” Godfrey said. “The EIS process will make all this information available. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered, including the cumulative effects.”

Significant issues to be analyzed in depth in the EIS will include impacts associated with construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of the wind turbines on the following resources: recreational and commercial boating and fishing activities, endangered marine mammals and reptiles, birds, aviation, benthic habitat, aesthetics, cultural resources, radio and

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television frequencies, ocean currents, and land resources.

Alternatives to be addressed in the EIS will include: the no action alternative; alternative wind park locations, including offshore vs. upland; submarine cable route alternatives; alternative landfall and overland cable route locations; and alternative connections to existing transmission lines.

The Draft EIS is anticipated to be available for public review in the summer of 2003.

The proposed 170 wind turbines and the interconnecting electrical cables would be outside of the three-mile limit and are therefore outside of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' jurisdiction. Normally, Section 10 only applies out to the limits of the territorial seas. However, under the provisions of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) anyone proposing such structures on the continental shelf must obtain a permit from the Corps of Engineers under Section 10.

A Corps' webpage, <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/news/windfarm.htm>, has more information on the proposed wind farm project, including the public notice, the Federal Register Notice of Intent, etc.

To assist in properly evaluating the proposal, the Corps of Engineers will begin soliciting public comments at the scoping meetings in March. Although scoping will continue throughout the process, people are asked to submit any written comments on scoping by April 8, 2002, to ensure that the scope for the EIS is as complete as possible. Written statements should be forwarded to Brian E. Valiton at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, 696 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742-2751.